

Oriente Coffee Building
(La Touraine)
300 Sixth St.
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-512

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322-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Orienta Coffee Building is located on the southeast corner of Square 459. The four-story building measures 54' (north-south) by 80' (east-west) and stands approximately 56' high. On both ends it abutts smaller, older structures. Stylistically, its exterior is expressed in a straightforward, almost industrial fashion; but it makes use of abstracted and/or isolated classical elements in the manner characteristic of the Art Moderne.

The structure is of reinforced concrete and consists of a four (east-west) by three (north-south) rectangular column grid. Deep cast-in-place beams span east-west and support a one-way ribbed slab.

The two yellow-brick facades have a sandstone base. The structure is expressed on the outside as giant four-story piers which support the brick roof parapet. Recessed between the piers at each bay are the windows and the spandrel panels. An additional bay occurs at the corner chamfer, wherein the main entrance is located. It is ornamentally singled-out with an applied limestone portico with a curved pediment. At the roof parapet level are metal letters saying: ORIENTA COFFEE FOUNDED 1884.

On the westernmost bay of the C Street facade occurs the entrance to a recessed loading dock. The entrance has a bay-wide steel roll-up door. Immediately to the east of this bay is an open freight elevator well which occupies the entire structural bay and has windows to the outside on each floor. An elevator penthouse on this bay is visible from the street. Its walls are clad in yellow brick.

On the interior, the level of the first floor is about 5' above the C Street sidewalk. The layout on this level consists of three separate areas: freight receiving/storage on the western bay of the building; offices on the three remaining bays; and bathrooms along the north edge. At the southeast chamfered corner is an entrance vestibule with four ample steps leading up to the offices. Wood and glass partitions set up the spatial division of the office areas.

The upper floors were not accessible.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Wardman Company built this structure for the Browning and Banes Roasting Plant in 1928 and while no architect is listed, its exterior features reflect a sophisticated approach to ornamentation within the idiom of Art Moderne.

The size and strength of the giant piers within the bland immediate environment impart to this building a landmark stature. Nevertheless, the scale of the facades is effectively humanized through the careful and contained articulation of its ornamentation.

While not coherent with its urban surrounds, the quality of the Orienta Coffee Building makes it a distinguished, urbane focal point in the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation District. In addition, it is one of the few extant Art Deco/Moderne Buildings in the area.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

Facade: All bays on both street facades have identical decoration. At the base there is a continuous sandstone plinth which projects slightly under each pier to suggest dadoes. From these rise the yellow brick piers which terminate on a flush stone ashlar above the fourth-floor lintels. Below this termination is a stone patera with a bas-relief of a spread eagle.

The bay-wide windows sit directly on the sandstone base at the first floor. Above each is a rectangular spandrel panel in yellow brick, with an ornamental stone coursing near its lower edge and a stone sill course at the top. A small terra-cotta tile with an urn in low relief is located at the center of each panel. The third and fourth floor spandrels are identical. Constructed of metal, they each present three side-by-side thrice-recessed panels with a continuous guilloche band below and an anthemion molding above. Over the fourth floor windows, defining the roof parapet, a flush stone beltcourse is embellished underneath by oversized dentils.

The bay at the corner chamfer is treated like the others on the two facades except for the ground level where a stone portico frames the main entrance. Its jambs widen at the base, thus creating an overall effect of an Egyptian pylon.

The outer edge of the pylon presents a continuous haut-relief perimeter band consisting of recurring flat disks and a delicate leaf motif. The door opening in the pylon is articulated by a bead-and-reel molding. Inside the opening, at each upper corner, are placed single scroll brackets in an affronted position. The brackets are limestone. The area between the two running decorations is left flat on the jambs. On the upper corners there are decorative recessed panels with an urn and foliage motif. Directly above the opening is a panel where the ghost of metal letters still reads: "BROWNING & BAINES, INC. 300 SIXTH ST."

The entire pylon is topped by a cynatium with running palmette decoration. Above it rests a rounded pediment. It is freely rendered with its rounded cornice springing from floral paterae at each end. Another patera with a simple concentric motif occurs at the top. The tympanum is decorated with delicate rinceaux.

The entrance itself is double door glazed in a single panel. Above them, a transom light presents vertical wrought iron bars with a central wreath.